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THE INSTABILITY OF THE FAMILY

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The problem of race progress involves the problem of race maintenance and race improvement. It is possible to have race improvement in a decreasing population, but no matter how great the race improvement may be, such a population is on the road to extinction. Again, it is possible to have race deterioration in a growing population, but no matter how numerous such a population may become, it is on the road to social disintegration. The normal condition of race progress, therefore, involves a condition in which the population is at least self-perpetuating and, preferably, one in which it is increasing, while its individual and social status is continuously improving.

The human race increases only by the excess of births over deaths. The population of any specific area, as the United States, may increase either by the excess of the births over the deaths or by immigration or by a combination of both. That is, to use Professor Giddings' phraseology, either by genetic aggregation or by congregation or both. The family is identified directly only with the aspect of genetic aggregation, since the customary method of reproduction is institutionalized under that designation. Race perpetuation therefore depends upon the efficiency and stability of the family. This stability and efficiency depends mainly upon three things, viz.:

(1) The regularity of marriages. Any change in the relative number of marriages in the population is likely to affect the problem of race perpetuation. This will depend, however, upon (2) the regularity of the birth rate. It would be possible to have a stationary or increasing population with a declining marriage rate if the number of children per family increased sufficiently to offset the decrease in the number of families, or, again, we might have the same condition with a declining birth rate per family if the number of families were sufficiently increased. (3) The permanence of the marriage relation will affect not only the birth rate, but the matter

of race culture as well. It will now be necessary to examine these elements of our problem in respect to the United States.

I. EVIDENCES OF INSTABILITY

1. *The Marriage Rate.* The recent report of the Federal Census Office on marriage and divorce provides the first reliable statistics for the computation of marriage rates in the United States. The returns were not complete, but were sufficiently so for all practical purposes. This report reveals a persistent increase in the marriage rate, the regularity of which is interrupted only as a result of the financial depressions of 1893 and 1903. In the period covered by the report, 1887 to 1906, 12,832,044 marriages were recorded. Taking the average of the five-year periods in which 1890, 1895, 1900 and 1905 are the median years, except 1905, which is the average for 1903 to 1906 inclusive, and comparing these with the population of these years, as estimated by the Census Bureau, we have the following:

Census.	MARRIAGES.			POPULATION.			Population to one marriage.	Marriage to 100,000 population.
	Annual average.	INCREASE.		Total.	INCREASE.			
		Number.	Per cent.		Number.	Per cent.		
1905	806,399	121,358	17.7	82,574,195	6,579,620	8.7	102	976
1900	684,981	83,999	14.9	75,994,575	6,523,431	9.4	111	901
1895	595,982	52,221	9.6	69,471,144	6,523,430	10.4	117	857
1890	543,761	.....	....	62,947,714	.....	....	115	864

Thus we have a slight gain in marriages over the growth of population. A slightly more significant rate is obtained by comparing the number of marriages with the unmarried population fifteen years of age and over, including the widowed and divorced. On page 9 of Census Bulletin No. 96 this comparison is made, both for the uncorrected totals on the basis of the total population and also exclusive of the population and marriages of those counties for which marriage returns were either lacking or incomplete. Taking the second comparison for the sake of greater accuracy we have:

Census.	Population.	Unmarried population 15 years of age and over.	MARRIAGES, ANNUAL AVERAGE.		
			Total.	Per 10,000 population.	Per 100,000 unmarried population, 15 years and over.
1900	73,385,121	21,261,642	684,981	93	321
1890	59,313,546	17,029,598	538,891	91	316

Upon either basis of comparison the number of marriages gained on the population slightly during the last decade. It is apparent, therefore, that from the point of view of marriages the family is holding its own, and no evidence of instability is to be found.

2. *Birth Rate.* The situation is different when we turn to the problem of the birth rate. Statistics of births are very inaccurately kept in most portions of the United States. A recent study made by the Census Bureau employed two methods, however, which arrive at some very interesting facts regarding the birth rate. The first method is a comparison of the number and per cent. of children under ten years of age in the total population. The result follows:

Census.	Total population.	Population under ten years of age.	Per cent of total Population under ten years of age.
1900	75,994,575	18,044,751	23.7
1890	62,662,250	15,208,691	24.3
1880	50,155,783	13,394,176	26.7
1870	38,558,371	10,329,426	26.8
1860	31,443,321	9,013,696	28.7
1850	23,191,876	6,739,041	29.1
1840	17,063,353	5,440,593	31.9
1830	12,860,702	4,224,897	32.9
1820	9,638,453	3,150,638	32.7
1810	7,239,881	2,424,683	33.5
1800	5,308,483	1,776,010	33.5

It is apparent that the population is more adult than it was a century ago. The decrease of the number of children, as compared with the whole population, is constant throughout the period. The suggestion is that there has been a diminution of the birth rate for the period, but the argument is not conclusive. The greater proportion of adults may be due either to immigration or to greater

longevity. A second comparison serves to establish a little more clearly the fact of the diminishing birth rate. By comparing the number of children with the number of women of children-bearing age we get closer to the rate than by comparing with the whole population. The comparison is made of children five years of age and under with females between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine years. Figures are obtainable from 1850-1900, and are as follows:

Census.	Number of children 5 years and under to 1,000 females 15-49 years of age.	Decrease in number by decades.
1900.....	474	11
1890.....	485	74
1880.....	559	13
1870.....	572	62
1860.....	634	8 ¹
1850.....	626	..

Thus it appears that, per 1000 potential mothers, the number of children has decreased from 626 to 474 in a half century. In 1900 there were only three-fourths as many living children to each 1000 potential mothers as there were in 1860.

The recent study of the Census Bureau on "A Century of Population Growth" makes a further comparison of the number of children per family. In 1790 the average size of the family was 5.8, while in 1900 it was 4.6. The number of children under sixteen years of age to each family in 1790 was 2.8, as compared with 1.5 in 1900. In the century the number of households increased tenfold, while the number of children under sixteen years of age has increased little more than sixfold.

From any method of calculation it is clear that the birth rate is decreasing rapidly. Diminution of genetic aggregation is the inevitable result.

3. *Permanence of the Marriage Relation.* With the completion of the present report of the Census Bureau on marriage and divorce we are in possession of divorce statistics for continental United States for a consecutive period of forty years, 1867-1906. During this period there was granted a total of 1,274,341 divorces. Of these, 328,716 were granted during the period covered by the first report, 1867-86, and 945,625 during that covered by the second, 1887-1906.

¹Increase.

Comparing the annual average of divorces by five-year periods, for which the years given is the median year, except that for 1905, which is the average for the four years 1903-6, with the population, as estimated by the Census Bureau, we have the following:

Census.	DIVORCES.			POPULATION.			Population to one divorce.	Divorces per 100,000 population.
	Annual average.	INCREASE.		Total.	INCREASE.			
		Number.	Per cent.		Number.	Per cent.		
1905	67,791	12,289	22.1	82,574,195	6,579,620	8.7	1,218	82
1900	55,502	14,890	36.7	75,994,575	6,523,431	9.4	1,369	73
1895	40,612	7,415	22.3	69,471,144	6,523,430	10.4	1,711	58
1890	33,197	8,573	34.8	62,947,714	6,395,966	11.3	1,896	53
1885	24,624	5,481	28.6	56,551,748	6,395,965	12.8	2,297	44
1880	19,143	4,774	33.2	50,155,783	5,798,706	13.1	2,620	38
1875	14,369	3,162	28.2	44,357,077	5,798,706	15.	3,087	32
1870	11,207	.....	.....	38,558,371	.....	.....	3,441	29

The population in 1905 was little more than double that of 1870, while divorces were six times as numerous, showing the increase in the divorce rate to have been approximately three times as rapid as the growth in population.

A more significant result is obtained if we compare the number of divorces with the married population. On the basis of present statistics, such a comparison is possible during the period of the second divorce report. Using the average of five-year periods, as before, we obtain the following table:

Census.	Married population.	Divorces, annual average.	Married population to one divorce.	Divorces per 100,000 married population.
1900	27,770,101	55,502	500	200
1890	22,447,769	33,197	676	148
1880	17,908,092	19,143	935	107
1870	13,823,708	11,207	1,233	81

It appears that the divorce rate is two and one-half times greater than the increase in the married population.

A further comparison is possible between the number of marriages and the number of divorces. Taking the annual average

of five-year periods of marriages and divorces, we have the following:

Census.	Marriages, annual average.	Divorces, annual average.	Marriages to one divorce.	Divorces per 1,000 marriages.
1905	806,339	67,791	11.9	85.3
1900	684,981	55,502	12.3	81.
1895	595,982	40,612	14.6	68.1
1890	543,761	33,197	16.3	61.

Thus the ratio of divorces to marriages is constantly increasing.

II. CAUSES OF INSTABILITY

Too great emphasis ought not to be placed upon the fact of our slightly increasing marriage rate. It is probable that causes which are affecting the birth and divorce rates will ultimately affect the marriage rate, but for the purposes of our present discussion we may eliminate this element from consideration.

Two groups of causes are commonly assigned for the decline of the birth rate: The automatic limitation, due to the later ages at which marriages are contracted, the increase of social diseases, and the general decline in fecundity; the voluntary limitation, due to increasing knowledge of the means of preventing conception and to the multiplication of motives for the use of the available means.

It is the opinion of the writer that the former group of causes is not largely responsible for the decreasing birth rate. Professor Ross has pointed out the fact that, after making all due allowance for the later age at which marriages occur, there is still ample time for the bearing of a much larger number of children if desired than is now the rule. As a matter of fact, Holland and Belgium, with a small proportionate number of married women under thirty years of age, have among the highest birth rates of European countries, while France, which has the greatest percentage of women marrying under twenty years of age of any country of Europe, has at the same time the lowest birth rate. As to the effect of social diseases, it is an established fact that they are often exceedingly prevalent in oriental countries, where the birth rate is abnormally high. The general decline of fertility is so far merely an unproved supposition on the part of those who have assumed that the decline of the birth rate is due to physiological causes.

We are persuaded that the dominant causes are psychological and social. They are to be found chiefly in the determination on the part of parents to limit the number of their offspring. The motives for such voluntary limitation are to be found in our modern social and economic conditions. Among the industrial classes children are an increasing economic burden; among the middle classes they constitute a social handicap and an encumbrance to those seeking to rise in the social scale, while the desire on the part of the rich for the endowment of their children requires that they should be limited in number. As yet we are scarcely warranted in the assumption that the science of eugenics is sufficiently advanced to constitute a conscious programme for the securing of fewer but better born children, and idealistic motives are not the dominant ones.

In vain do we seek the causes of the modern divorce movement in the natural perversity of human nature, the laxity of legal administration or, even, in statutory grounds upon which divorces may be obtained. The true causes of the modern divorce movement are inherent in our modern social situation. It is a problem of adjustment of society to our new economic, social and ethical environment due to progress. The stress of modern economic life, rising standards of living, the passing of the economic function of the family, the economic emancipation of women, the struggle for social liberation, the popularization of law, the increase of popular learning, the improved social status of women, the revised ethical concepts, the equal standard of morals for both sexes, the higher ideals of domestic happiness, the new basis of sexual morality—these are the forces that are producing their inevitable results. The old religious-proprietary family of patriarchal authority is doomed, and until the new spiritual restraints are formed to take the place of those that are passing away a condition which, in the sight of some, will border on chaos is bound to result. The present phenomena we are fully persuaded are the phenomena of transition and are alarming only to those who view the family as an institution which has its origin in and depends for its perpetuation upon external authority.

The causes, therefore, which will ultimately, perhaps, affect the marriage rate and which are now resulting in a diminished birth rate and an accelerated divorce rate are not superficial causes which

may be removed by the action of state legislatures except as they facilitate the adjustment of society to the new basis of our modern civilization. They are the product of forces resident within society.

III. RESULTS OF THE INSTABILITY OF THE FAMILY

Statistics of marriages in the United States do not reveal the degree of race intermixture occurring, but in the general enumeration of population we have given the nationality of parentage, which shows the large extent to which amalgamation is taking place. Thus we have in the intermarriage of different racial stocks an efficient means of creating greater homogeneity in the population. The high marriage rate, which approximates or exceeds the growth of population, is of the greatest possible consequence in the physical assimilation of the heterogeneous elements. Too great a degree of heterogeneity is clearly an obstacle to coöperative social action and a positive hindrance to progress. But as long as a high degree of intermarriage continues, which results in the absorption of new ethnic contributions to the population, a degree of homogeneity may be obtained which will offer no bar to race improvement.

Whether or not such amalgamation will prove a help or a hindrance will depend somewhat upon the elements which enter into it. Few statistics are available, however, upon which any scientific conclusions can be based as to the comparative value of specific racial combinations.

A declining birth rate means a decreasing rate of growth and, if it proceeds far enough, an actually decreasing population. If growth continues in spite of decreasing genetic aggregation it must be accomplished by congregation. This is what is taking place in the United States. The result is a greater degree of heterogeneity of the population. Whether this will become, again, a help or a hindrance will depend upon the ethnic stocks represented in the larger immigration. Exclusion acts are scientifically justifiable to the extent to which they limit immigration to ethnic stocks capable of advantageous assimilation, thus preventing the development of classes and castes inimical to social and race progress.

Whether immigration in the United States has had the effect of checking the native birth rate, as Professor Marshall suggests, or whether the low birth rate and the slow growth of population from this source has stimulated immigration, or whether there is

any casual relation between the two is yet to be determined. Whatever the conclusion may be, it cannot affect the problem with which we have to deal; namely, that a declining birth rate in an increasing population results in an increasing heterogeneity.

The large number of divorces granted to childless husbands and wives, slightly exceeding those granted to those having children, is usually cited to emphasize the failure of childless marriage. It is probable, and we believe actually the case, in numerous instances that this is putting effect for cause; that childlessness is often due to infelicity rather than infelicity to childlessness. It is evident, at least, that the birth rate is retarded by the large number of separations in the early years of married life. To the extent to which domestic infelicity leads to a diminution of the birth rate, the rising tide of divorce will tend to prove a corrective in affording another opportunity for the formation of new marriages which may result in offspring. The problem of the relation of divorce to the birth rate is more complex than is usually supposed.

Divorce conditions indicate an enormous amount of suffering within the family life of the American people. Divorce is evidence of that portion of it which becomes unbearable. Much domestic unhappiness is never exhibited in the divorce courts. The perpetuation of the family upon the basis of choice, as is now the case in respect to its formation, toward which present tendencies seem clearly to point, will be a distinct gain in social happiness. Whether or not it will affect the birth rate, it will constitute a large element in the efficiency of that phase of race culture which belongs to the home. The health, happiness and future efficiency of children reared in happy homes are greatly enhanced.

If the phenomena of family instability shall prove to be, as we have suggested, the phenomena of transition and of a new social adjustment, then we may look forward to a possible future in which, under more stable and wholesome family conditions, the science of eugenics may result in the fostering of a system of ethics which will require a birth rate sufficient for race maintenance and produce a population which shall be able to accomplish the seemingly hitherto unachieved task of educating and at the same time reproducing itself.